




SKY HIGH

BURNIE BOOKS COINS & STAMPS

13 MOUNT ST., BURNIE

WE BUY SELL & EXCHANGE



HIS FEET
WERE ON THE
GROUND BUT
HIS HEART
WAS IN
THE SKY!

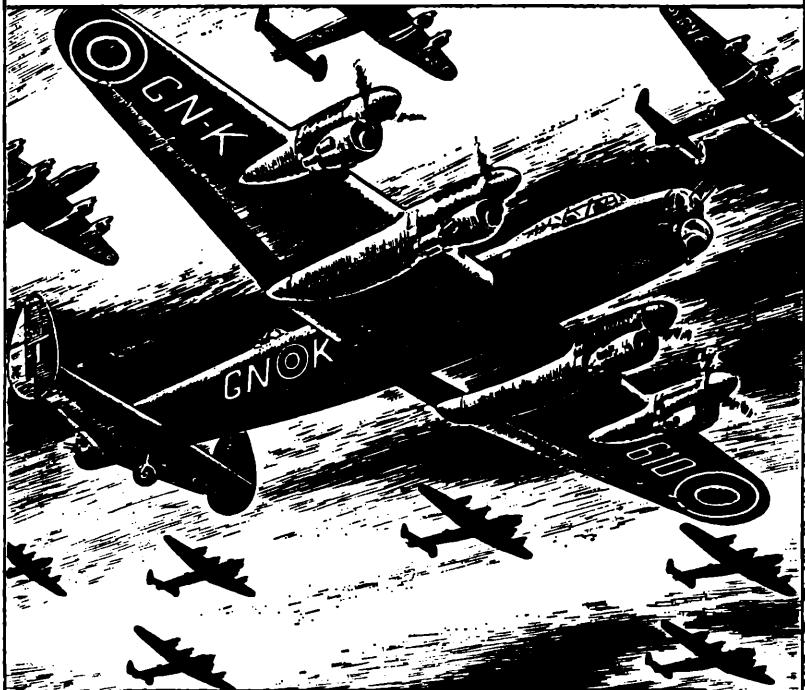
BIG VALUE HOLIDAY READING

THESE
TWO
GREAT
LIBRARIES
ARE ALSO
ON SALE
NOW !



EACH WITH
192 PAGES
PACKED
WITH
DRAMATIC
BATTLE
ACTION !

SKY HIGH



THE STORY OF ROYAL AIR FORCE BOMBER COMMAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR IS A STORY OF FINE NEW AIRCRAFT AND OF **MEN** — YOUNG MEN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, CLERKS, BARRISTERS, SHOP ASSISTANTS, UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, WHO LAID ASIDE THEIR PENS, THEIR BOOKS, AND THE TOOLS OF THEIR TRADE, AND BECAME AIRCREWS OF A GREAT ARMADA OF FLYING MACHINES. FOR A FEW BRIEF YEARS THESE MEN IN THEIR THOUSANDS RODE SKY HIGH THROUGH DANGER AND SUDDEN DEATH — AND NOW THEIR GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS ARE HISTORY, AND MANY STORIES ABOUT THEM ARE WAITING TO BE TOLD. . . .

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

Chapter 1. TAKEN OFF FLYING

IT WAS IN OCTOBER 1941 THAT JIMMY GREGG, A WELSH CAMERA MAN WHO HAD SETTLED IN HOLLYWOOD, GOT HOLD OF A BRITISH NEWSPAPER, AND SUDDENLY REALISED THAT HIS COUNTRY NEEDED HIM....



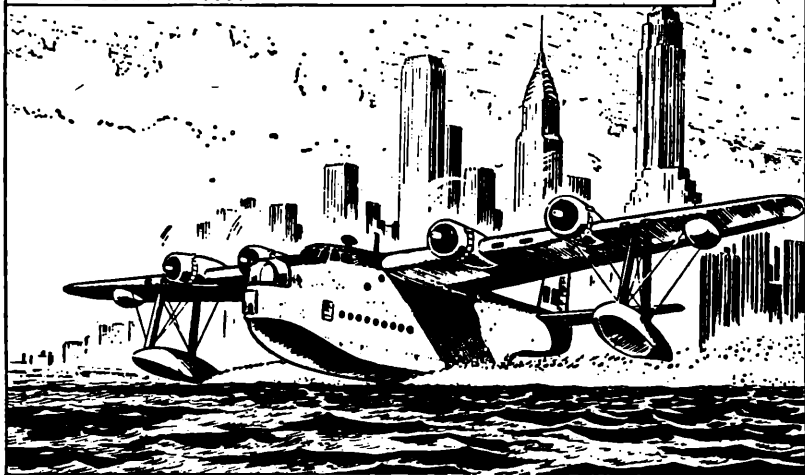
JIMMY REALISED THE NEED FOR AIRCREWS — AND FELT THAT HIS SKILL AS A TECHNICIAN MIGHT BE OF USE TO HIS HOME COUNTRY. COMING TO A RAPID DECISION, HE TURNED IN HIS JOB AT THE STUDIO, AND MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO LEAVE FOR BRITAIN BY THE FASTEST TRANSPORT HE COULD GET....



LEAVING LOS ANGELES, JIMMY CROSSED THE CONTINENT OF AMERICA BY EXPRESS TRAIN — AND HE WAS MET IN NEW YORK BY THE FRIEND WHO HAD ARRANGED PASSAGE FOR HIM....



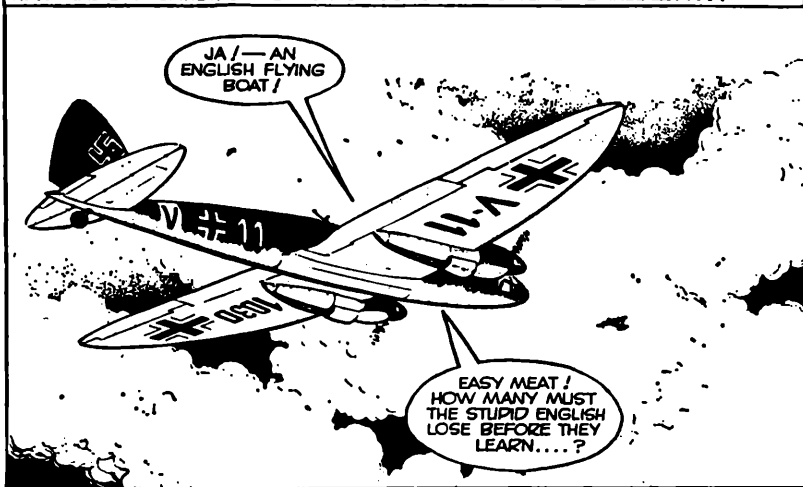
THREE HOURS LATER, THE HUGE SUNDERLAND FLYING BOAT, WITH JIMMY GREGG AMONG ITS PASSENGERS, WAS LIFTING OUT OF THE WATERS OF THE HUDSON RIVER....



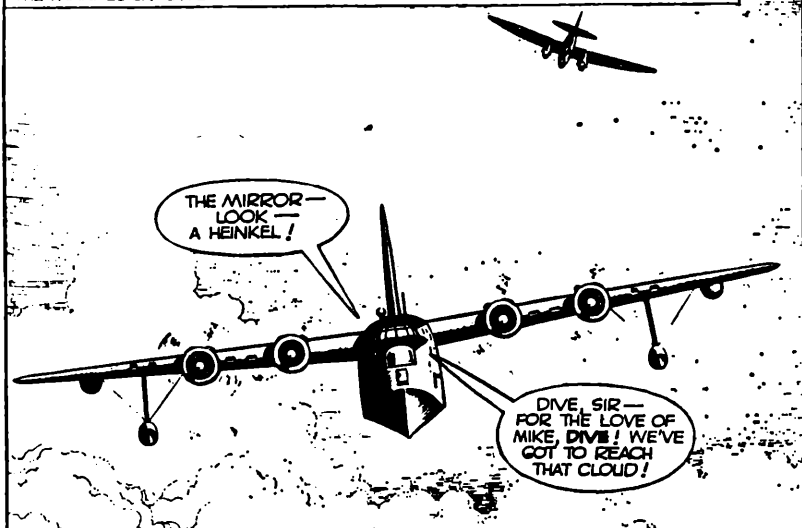
FOR AN UNARMED, CIVIL AIRCRAFT TO CROSS THE ATLANTIC IN WAR-TIME WAS A HAZARDOUS ADVENTURE. THE LONG RANGE MAHAUDERS OF THE LUFTWAFFE PROWLED LIKE VULTURES ABOVE THE OCEAN WASTES. THE SUNDERLAND, FLYING STRAIGHT AND STIFFY ABOVE A BROKEN CLOUD, HAD BEEN EN ROUTE FOR FIVE HOURS WHEN THE LAST ITALY WAS CHACKLED IN ITS RECEIVERS....



BUT THE PRESENCE OF THE SUNDERLAND HAD ALREADY BEEN DETECTED BY THE NEW RADIO LOCATION DEVICE IN THE NOSE OF A PROWLING HEINKEL III.....



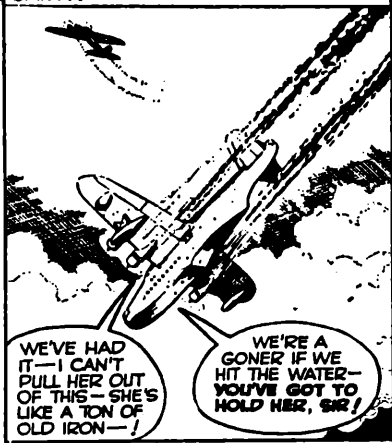
THE MARAUDER SWEEP IN UPON THE TAIL OF ITS LUMBERING VICTIM...



BUT THE HEINKEL HAD BEEN SPOTTED TOO LATE—AND AS THE SUNDERLAND PILOT PUSHED THE STICK DESPERATELY FORWARD, A HAIL OF CANNON SHELLS SLAMMED INTO THE FLYING BOAT'S HULL—THROUGH PETROL TANKS AND PASSENGER CABIN....



WITH FLAMING FUEL TANKS, AND SHATTERED WINGS AND RUDDER, THE SUNDERLAND LOST AIRSPEED AND LURCHED INTO AN UNCONTROLLABLE SPIN...



TO JIMMY GREGG, IN THE PASSENGER CABIN OF THE STRICKEN FLYING BOAT, IT SEEMED AS IF THE WORLD WAS SPINNING INTO PIECES....

... GOT TO STAY
WHERE I AM... THE
KITE IS SPINNING...
WITHOUT MY SAFETY
BELT I'D BE FLUNG
AGAINST THE WALLS...

AND THEN THE SUNDERLAND STRUCK THE SEA.....

THIS IS IT—
SHE'S STRIKING—
AAAGH!

FOR PETE'S
SAKE—OPEN THE
HATCH!

AS THE SHATTERED FLYING BOAT SANK SLOWLY INTO THE OCEAN, JIMMY GREGG FIERCELY RALLIED THE PANIC-STRICKEN PASSENGERS NEAR TO HIM...



WE'LL NEVER GET OUT—WE'LL NEVER—

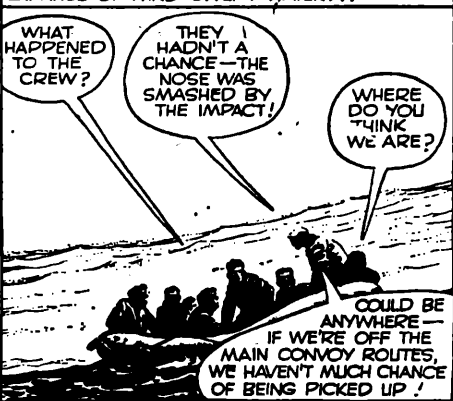
SHUT UP!
—WE'VE GOT TO MOVE FAST—IF THESE FOOLS OPEN THAT HATCH WE'LL SINK LIKE A STONE! THERE'S A LIFE RAFT IN THE REAR LOCKER—AND A HATCH IN THE TAIL! COME ON—

DRAWING THE OTHER MAN WITH HIM, GREGG GOT THE TAIL HATCH OPEN, PULLED THE LIFE RAFT FROM ITS LOCKER AND FLUNG IT ON THE SEA. AS IT INFLATED HE TURNED AND YELLED URGENTLY INTO THE CABIN... FOR THE HULL WAS TILTING AS THE SEA FLOODED IN....



QUICK—WE CAN STILL MAKE IT—THE RAFT WILL HOLD US ALL! BRING EVERYBODY OUT—!

RISKING HIS OWN LIFE, GREGG GOT THE LAST MAN OUT—AND AS HE LEAPT INTO THE CROWDED LIFE RAFT, THE SUNDERLAND SLID INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA. HUDDLED TOGETHER IN THE SHALLOW WELL OF THEIR FRAGILE RUBBER CRAFT, THE SURVIVORS FOUND THEMSELVES DRIFTING IN A LIMITLESS EXPANSE OF WIND-SWEPT WATER...



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CREW?

THEY HADN'T A CHANCE—THE NOSE WAS SMASHED BY THE IMPACT!

WHERE DO YOU THINK WE ARE?

COULD BE ANYWHERE—IF WE'RE OFF THE MAIN CONVOY ROUTES, WE HAVEN'T MUCH CHANCE OF BEING PICKED UP!

BUT THE SURVIVORS WERE NEADER LAND THAN THEY REALISED — FOR THE SUNDERLAND HAD BEEN HALF AN HOUR'S FLIGHT FROM IRELAND. IT WAS FIVE HOURS LATER THAT GREGG SUDDENLY SAW —



THEIR LUCK WAS IN, ALL RIGHT — FOR IT WAS A BRITISH TRAWLER, CRUISING IN COASTAL WATERS. DRAWN BY THE SMOKE FROM THE LIFE-RAFT'S FLARES, IT CHANGED COURSE — AND SOON....



THE TRAWLER TOOK THE CRASH SURVIVORS TO LIVERPOOL. SO FINALLY GREGG FOUND HIMSELF BACK IN BRITAIN WITH NOTHING BUT HIS WALLET AND THE CLOTHES HE STOOD IN—BUT HE HAD ENOUGH MONEY TO GET TO LONDON, WHERE HE WENT TO AIR MINISTRY AND TOLD HIS TALE....

—SO YOU SEE, I'VE COME TO BRITAIN TO TRY TO GET INTO BOMBER AIRCREW. IT WAS MY HARD LUCK THAT EVERYTHING I OWNED IN THE WORLD WENT DOWN IN THAT SUNDERLAND...

IT'S THE FORTUNES OF WAR, OLD CHAP—I'LL PASS YOU ON TO THE RECRUITING SECTION, WHO'LL LOOK INTO YOUR CASE.

AS CHANCE WOULD HAVE IT, THE RECRUITING OFFICER WAS AN UNPLEASANT CHARACTER—AND GREGG WAS IN FOR A SURPRISE....

SO THAT'S YOUR STORY. YOU'VE BEEN DODGING THE ISSUE IN HOLLYWOOD FOR TWO YEARS WHILE THE BOYS OVER HERE HAVE BEEN SWEATING THEIR HEARTS OUT TO BUILD AN AIR FORCE—AND NOW THAT THE TIDE'S ON THE TURN, YOU WANT TO COME IN ON THE ACT.

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH HOLLYWOOD? WERE THE JOBS GETTING SCARCE?

NOW, LOOK HERE—I DIDN'T COME ALL THIS WAY...

FLINGING GREGG A CHIT, THE RECRUITING OFFICER TOLD HIM TO REPORT TO LORD'S CRICKET GROUND. GREGG MADE HIS WAY THERE, SMARTING UNDER THE UNSYMPATHETIC TREATMENT....

WHAT KIND OF A COUNTRY IS THIS? FIRST, I GET INSULTED BY THE RECRUITING OFFICER—AND THEN I'M TOLD TO REPORT TO THIS PLACE! WHAT DO THEY THINK I AM—A FAST BOWLER, OR SOMETHING?

TAKE IT EASY, CHUM. THIS IS THE ASSEMBLY POINT FOR MEN TO BE TRAINED FOR AIRCREW. SO DON'T GET STEAMED UP ABOUT THOSE DESK WALLAHS!



AND SO JIMMY GREGG BEGAN HIS INITIAL TRAINING—AND IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED HE WENT THROUGH THE MILL WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHERS...



AT LAST GREGG WAS DRAFTED TO ELEMENTARY FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL....



IN HIS OWN LINE, GREGG WAS AN ABLE TECHNICIAN—AND HE FOUND THE LECTURE COURSES EASY AND FASCINATING. THE TIME CAME FOR HIS FIRST TRAINING FLIGHT..

THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED AN AEROPLANE. THERE IS A NOSE AT ONE END, AND A TAIL AT THE OTHER—

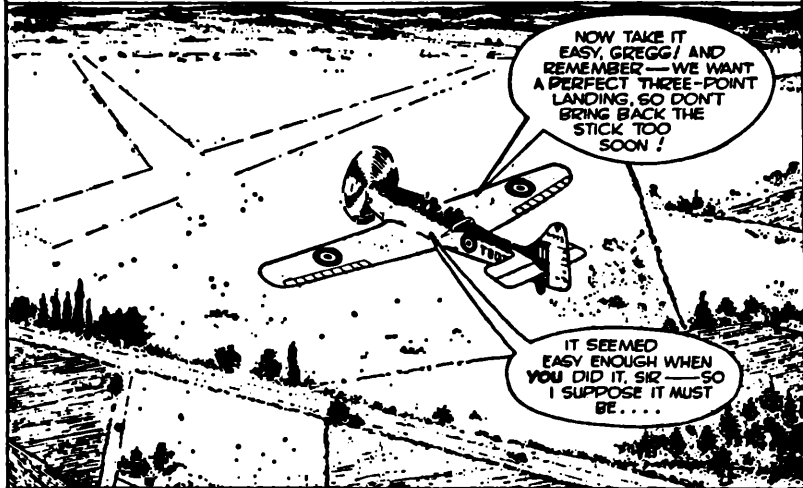
THAT'S RIGHT ENOUGH, SIR—JUST LIKE THE SUNDERLAND I WAS SHOT DOWN IN OVER THE ATLANTIC.....



GREGG PUT IN A LOT OF FLYING TIME IN THE FOLLOWING WEEK. HE GOT USED TO HANDLING THE MAGISTER IN SIMPLE MANOEUVRES. HE WAS SOON READY FOR HIS FIRST SOLO LANDING ATTEMPT....

NOW TAKE IT EASY, GREGG! AND REMEMBER—WE WANT A PERFECT THREE-POINT LANDING, SO DON'T BRING BACK THE STICK TOO SOON!

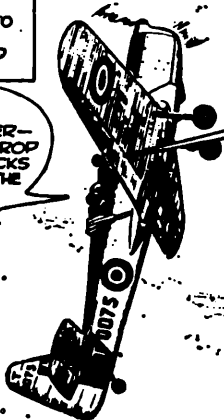
IT SEEMED EASY ENOUGH WHEN YOU DID IT, SIR—SO I SUPPOSE IT MUST BE....



GREGG BROUGHT OFF HIS SOLO LANDING ALL RIGHT, SO THAT AFTERNOON, THEY WENT UP TO 3,000 FEET, WHERE THE INSTRUCTOR DEMONSTRATED A STALL....

IN THIS POSITION, THE WINGS HAVE LOST THEIR LIFTING POWER-- AND THE AIRCRAFT WILL DROP LIKE A BRICK UNTIL IT PICKS UP ENOUGH SPEED FOR THE WINGS TO DO THEIR STUFF AGAIN....

I CAN'T SAY I LIKE THE IDEA....



WHEN GREGG SAID HE 'DIDN'T LIKE THE IDEA', HE HAD ONLY BEEN JOKING — BUT WHEN THE NOSE OF THE LITTLE MAGISTER DROPPED FORWARD, AND THE PIT OF HIS STOMACH CONTRACTED WITH THE SENSATION OF 'FREE FALL', HE SUDDENLY FELT UNCOMFORTABLE — AND HIS MIND FLASHED BACK HELPLESSLY TO THE AWFUL MOMENTS IN THE CRASHING SUNDERLAND...

NOW WE'RE GOING DOWN LIKE A BRICK... FEEL OKAY?

YES...I'M OKAY...I THINK...



AS THE MAGISTER
PICKED UP AIR
SPEED...



AS THE TINY TRAINING CRAFT WHIRLED INTO A TIGHT SPIN, THE HORROR OF THOSE LAST FLEETING SECONDS IN THE SPINNING SUNDERLAND WHEN HE HAD BEEN STRAPPED IN HIS SEAT, STABBED INTO GREGG'S MIND... AND HE FROZE ON TO THE MAGISTER'S CONTROLS WITH RIGID, PANIC-STRIKEN MUSCLES, HIS EYES UNSEEING...

TAKE HER OUT OF IT NOW,
GREGG... CENTRALISE THE RUDDER...
OPEN THE THROTTLE... AND PULL THE
STICK BACK... GREGG! CAN YOU HEAR
WHAT I SAY... RELEASE THE
CONTROLS, YOU FOOL!



WITH GREGG'S HANDS AND FEET LOCKING THE CONTROLS, THE INSTRUCTOR COULD DO NOTHING. AS THE MAGISTER SPUN DOWNWARDS, HE YELLED AGAIN AND AGAIN INTO THE SPEAKING TUBE... USELESSLY. THEN, YANKING OFF HIS SAFETY BELT, HE ROSE IN THE COCKPIT, GRABBING THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER...

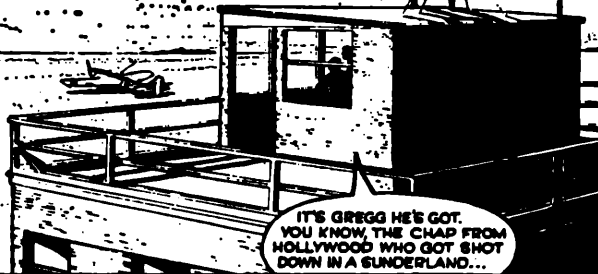
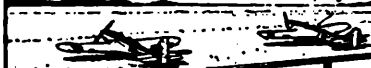
OKAY, MY SON... IF NOTHING ELSE WILL SHIFT YOU, THIS WILL...!



SORRY.... BUT THIS IS THE ONLY WAY!



MEANWHILE, ON THE GROUND, THERE HAD BEEN INTERESTED WATCHERS...



GREAT SCOTT! JOHNSON TOOK THAT SPIN RATHER CLOSE TO THE DECK! HE'S EITHER GETTING CARELESS IN HIS OLD AGE, OR HE'S TRYING TO PUT THE WIND UP THE TRAINEE!

IT'S GREGG HE'S GOT. YOU KNOW, THE CHAP FROM HOLLYWOOD WHO GOT SHOT DOWN IN A SUNDERLAND...

THE MAGISTER CAME IN TO LAND, WITH THE INSTRUCTOR AT THE CONTROLS, AND GREGG SPRAWLED SENSELESS IN THE FRONT COCKPIT...

WELL, THAT'S THE CLOSEST SHAVE I'VE EVER HAD... WHAT A PITY YOUNG GREGG HAD TO BLOT HIS COPYBOOK LIKE THIS... IT'LL MEAN THE END OF HIS FLYING CAREER...



IT WAS THE LAST TIME JIMMY GREGG WOULD EVER BE ALLOWED TO SIT IN A MAGISTER COCKPIT... HE SHOOK HIS HEAD DAZEDLY AS THE INSTRUCTOR UNDOED HIS STRAPS AND HAULED HIM OUT...

COME ON, LADDIE... THE SHOW IS OVER!

SORRY, SIR... I GUESS I LOST MY HEAD!



THE INSTRUCTOR TOOK GREGG TO THE MESS, AND BOUGHT HIM A HOT DRINK... THEN LED HIM TO A DISCREET CORNER TABLE...

...I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT GOT INTO ME, SIR! IT SEEMED ALMOST AS IF... NO, THERE'S NO POINT IN ME EXPLAINING...

SORRY IT HAD TO HAPPEN, LADDIE... YOU REALISE, OF COURSE, THAT THE C.O. WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE YOU OFF FLYING TRAINING... I'M AFRAID IT IS THE USUAL THING IN THIS KIND OF CASE...



AND SO THAT ONE FATAL INCIDENT SEEMED TO PUT PAY TO GREGG'S HOPES OF EVER FLYING WITH BOMBER COMMAND. IN HIS FINAL INTERVIEW WITH THE C.O. HE WAS LET DOWN GENTLY... FOR THE C.O. WAS AN UNDERSTANDING MAN. BUT THIS DID NOT EASE GREGG'S BITTERNESS...

...IT ISN'T THE SORT OF THING TO TAKE TO HEART, GREGG. WE'RE NOT ALL CUT OUT TO BE FLYERS... THERE'S A HUNDRED AND ONE OTHER JOBS IN THE R.A.F. JUST AS IMPORTANT AND VITAL. YOU MUST NOT LEAVE HERE THINKING THAT YOU HAVE FAILED...

NO, SIR... I SUPPOSE I CAN TRY FOR GROUND CREW...!

IF ONLY THEY'D GIVE ME A SECOND CHANCE... I KNOW I COULD OVERCOME THIS THING!



Chapter 2. TAIL-GUNNER'S ALIBI

AFTER A THOROUGH TRAINING IN ALL BRANCHES OF THE ARMOURERS TRADE...AUTOMATIC WEAPONS...BOMBS...FUSES...RIFLES, AND SMALL ARMS, GREGG WAS POSTED TO AN OPERATIONAL SQUADRON OF LANCASTERS. AS HE REPORTED AT THE GUARD-ROOM THE SQUADRON WERE THUNDERING ACROSS THE NEARBY RUNAWAY, HEADING FOR HITLER'S GERMANY...

OKAY, AIRMAN! REPORT TO SERGEANT WHITE IN THE ARMOURY...AT THE DOUBLE...YOU'RE ON AN OPERATIONAL SQUADRON NOW, LADDIE...SO LOOK ALIVE!



THE SQUADRON WAS SHORT OF ARMOURERS, AND THE NEXT FEW DAYS FOUND GREGG MOVING FROM ONE LANCASTER TO ANOTHER DISMANTLING THE BROWNINGS FROM THE TURRETS AND STRIPPING AND CLEANING EACH GUN. IT WAS A TRICKY JOB AND A THANKLESS ONE. GREGG SELDOM HAD A WORD FROM THE AIR GUNNERS, UNTIL ONE MORNING...

WELL IF IT ISN'T JIMMY GREGG!
I THOUGHT YOU WERE STILL LIVING
IT UP OUT IN HOLLYWOOD! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING HERE?



DAVE SIME! SO YOU
ARE THE MAN WHO KEEPS POOR
BLIGHTERS LIKE ME ON THE TROT
ALL DAY CLEANING THEIR GUNS!

SIME HAD NEVER BEEN A CLOSE FRIEND, BUT SEEING AN OLD FAMILIAR FACE INDUCED GREGG TO LEAVE THE SWELTERING TURRET FOR A CHAT...

IF YOU FIND
CLEANING BROWNING
GUNS SUCH A CHORE...
WHY AREN'T YOU IN
AIRCREW?

LOOK,
DAVE, IT'S GOOD TO SEE
YOU... BUT KEEP OFF THE
SUBJECT OF AIRCREW... I'M
BROWND OFF WITH IT! LET'S
GET SOME CHAR FROM THE
N.A.A.F.I. WAGON!

SOME AIRCREW CHAPS WERE GATHERED AROUND THE N.A.A.F.I. WAGON. GREGG ENVIED THEIR CAREFREE CONFIDENCE AS HE LISTENED TO DAVE SIME "SHOOTING A LINE" ABOUT HIS OPERATIONAL TRIPS.

... THE FLAK WAS PUMPING
UP BUT I STILL MANAGED TO
GIVE THE M.E. ANOTHER BURST
AND THEN I...

... YOU
WERE DARNED
LUCKY TO GET
ANOTHER BURST
IN JUDGING BY
THE CONDITION
OF YOUR GUNS
TODAY!

IT WAS A GUNNER'S DUTY TO LOOK AFTER HIS OWN GUNS, BUT DAVE SIME WAS CONTENT TO LEAVE IT TO THE ARMOURER...

LOOK, CHUM! I DON'T LIKE CRACKS LIKE THAT... ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY COME FROM SOME SPROG OF AN ARMOURER WHO CAN'T FLY!



ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! FORGET IT! BUT I STILL THINK YOUR GUNS WERE FILTHY!

WHITE WITH RAGE AND FRUSTRATION GREGG RETURNED TO THE ARMOURY, WHERE THE STRIPPING AND CLEANING OF SIME'S FOUR BROWNING GUNS KEPT HIM BUSY.

HEY, AIRMAN! DON'T LET SIME GET YOU TO DO ALL HIS WORK FOR HIM. I'VE HAD TO COMPLAIN MORE THAN ONCE ABOUT HIM TO THE GUNNERY LEADER! HE'S A LAZY DEVIL!

THAT'S OKAY, SARGE! HE'S GOT QUITE A TOUGH JOB ON HIS PLATE!



GREGG WAS RIGHT. THE TAIL-GUNNER OF EACH BOMBER WAS THE MAN WHOSE VIGILANCE, AND SKILL WOULD COUNT FOR NOTHING IF HIS GUNS JAMMED JUST BEFORE A NIGHT FIGHTER ATTACK! THAT NIGHT GREGG WATCHED THE SQUADRON PREPARE FOR TAKE-OFF. THE TARGET WAS THE MIGHTY RUHR VALLEY THE PERSONAL NIGHTMARE OF EVERY BOMBER CREW...

LET'S HOPE MY CLEVER FRIEND GREGG HAS FIXED MY GUNS PROPERLY!

SEEMS TO ME, SIME THAT YOU'RE LEAVING A LOT TO CHANCE... YOU SHOULD CLEAN YOUR OWN GUNS. IF THEY HAVE A STOPPAGE WE'LL BE RIGHT UP THE CREEK!



THE PILOT OF SIME'S AIRCRAFT WAS NOT ALTOGETHER SATISFIED WITH HIS 'LINE-SHOOTING' REAR GUNNER. HE WAS LEAVING NOTHING TO CHANCE...

PILOT TO
TAIL-GUNNER,
SEE THAT YOU TEST
YOUR GUNS WHEN
WE'RE OVER THE
SEA!

MY
GUNS HAVE
NEVER LET YOU
DOWN YET,
SKIPPER!

WELL
SEE THAT THEY
DON'T TONIGHT...
WITH THIS MOON IT'LL
BE JUST RIGHT FOR
THE NIGHT-FIGHTER
BOYS!

THE GATHERING WAVES OF THE MAIN BOMBER FORCE
ASSEMBLED ABOVE THE COLD WHITE FINGER OF THE
RENDEZVOUS SEARCHLIGHT...

NAVIGATOR
TO PILOT. SET
COURSE 089° THIRTY
SECONDS FROM
...NOW!

ROGER!
TURNING ON
089°...

LEAVING THE RENDEZVOUS POINT FOR THE ENEMY COAST WAS A DANGEROUS TIME WITH FOUR HUNDRED BOMBERS WHEELING ON TO THE SAME COURSE OVER A PATCH OF THE NORFOLK COAST...VERY DANGEROUS...

WHEW! THAT WAS A NEAR ONE!



I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO COME IN THROUGH THE ROOF, SKIPPER!

THE NORTH SEA SOON LAY BENEATH THEM IN THE MOON GLOW...

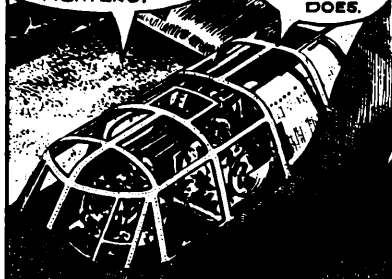
TESTING MY GUNS NOW, SKIPPER! ALL FIRING PERFECTLY!



THE 'BOFFINS', AS THE SCIENTISTS WERE KNOWN IN THE R.A.F., HAD PERFECTED A NIGHT-FIGHTER WARNING DEVICE KNOWN AS MONICA. MONICA SIGNALLLED THE APPROACH OF A FIGHTER BY A TICKING NOISE, RELAYED ON TO THE INTERCOM, WHICH INCREASED IN SOUND AS THE FIGHTER DREW NEARER...IT WAS A MIXED BLESSING...

SWITCH ON MONICA, WIRELESS OPERATOR! ENEMY COAST AHEAD! EVERYONE KEEP A SHARP LOOK-OUT FOR FIGHTERS!

THAT MONICA GIVES ME THE WILLIES, THAT DARNED TICKING FAIR GETS ME IT DOES.



EXCEPT FOR BRIEF SQUIRTS OF LIGHT FLAK FAR BENEATH THEM, THE NIGHT SKY ABOVE HOLLAND WAS QUIET...VERY QUIET...TOO QUIET.

HEY THERE, SIME! I DON'T LIKE IT! EVEN MONICA'S QUIET! I CAN'T HELP FEELING THE JERRY'S ARE WATCHING ... AND WAITING!

OH, DRY UP!
YOU'RE ENOUGH TO
GIVE US ALL THE
WILLIES!

BUT THE MID-UPPER GUNNER WAS RIGHT, THE FIGHTERS WERE ON THE SCENT. MONICA STARTED TO TICK QUIETLY, GRADUALLY AND INSISTENTLY THE SOUND INCREASED IN VOLUME...HIS STOMACH CONTRACTING WITH FEAR, SIME ROTATED HIS TURRET FRANTICALLY FROM PORT TO STARBOARD IN HIS SEARCH FOR THE INVISIBLE ENEMY...

HEY, SKIPPER...CAN'T WE GET OUT OF THIS?...IF A FIGHTER COMES OUT OF THIS CLOUD WE WON'T HAVE TIME TO DIVE!

KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT, TAIL GUNNER, TILL YOU'VE SOMETHING TO REPORT!

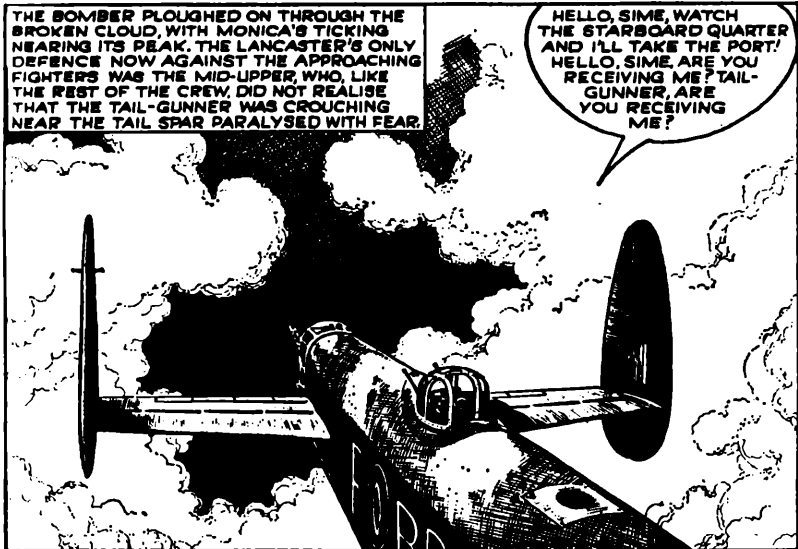
THE UNNERVING TICK OF MONICA, AND THE FEAR OF AN ENEMY APPROACHING THROUGH THE CLOUDS STRIPPED THE LAST PRETENCE OF COURAGE FROM THE 'LINE-SHOOTING' GUNNER...



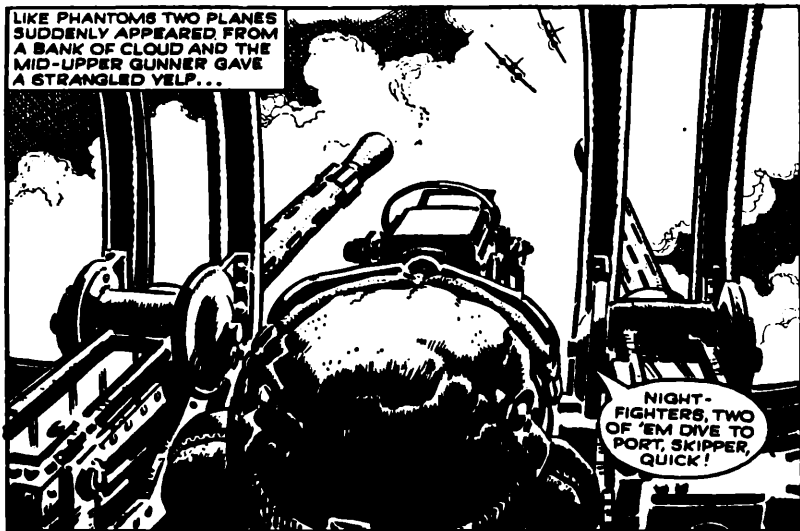
I CAN'T STAY HERE!
MUST GET OUT! I'LL SAY
THE GUNS JAMMED...
ANYTHING... I MUST
GET OUT!

THE BOMBER PLOUGHED ON THROUGH THE BROKEN CLOUD, WITH MONICA'S TICKING NEARING ITS PEAK. THE LANCASTER'S ONLY DEFENCE NOW AGAINST THE APPROACHING FIGHTERS WAS THE MID-UPPER, WHO, LIKE THE REST OF THE CREW, DID NOT REALISE THAT THE TAIL-GUNNER WAS CROUCHING NEAR THE TAIL SPAR PARALYSED WITH FEAR.

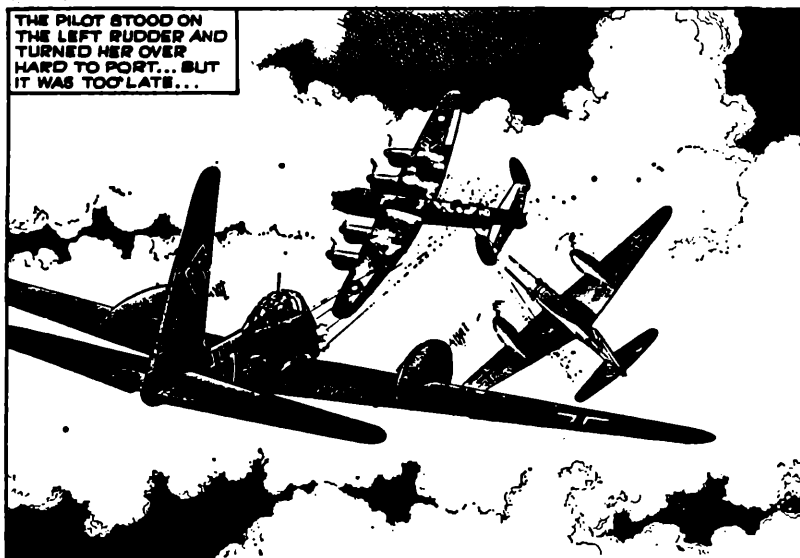
HELLO, SIME, WATCH
THE STARBOARD QUARTER
AND I'LL TAKE THE PORT!
HELLO, SIME, ARE YOU
RECEIVING ME? TAIL-
GUNNER, ARE YOU RECEIVING
ME?



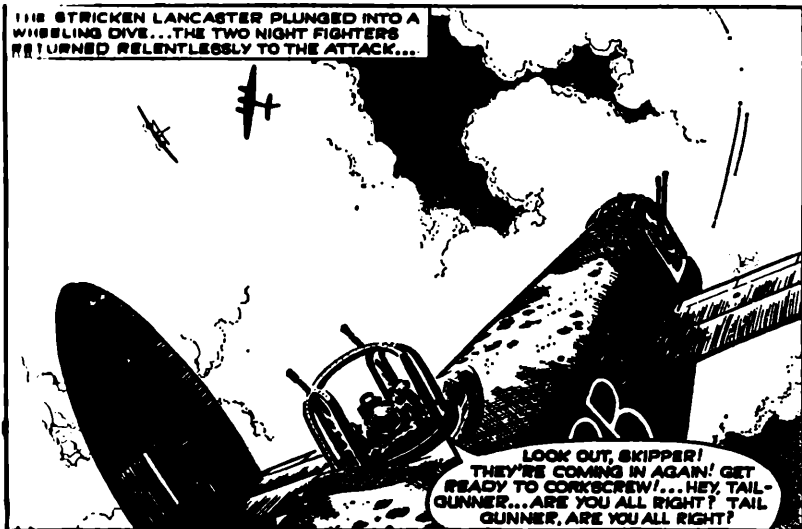
LIKE PHANTOMS TWO PLANES
SUDDENLY APPEARED FROM
A BANK OF CLOUD AND THE
MID-UPPER GUNNER GAVE
A STRANGLER YELP...



THE PILOT STOOD ON
THE LEFT RUDDER AND
TURNED HER OVER
HARD TO PORT... BUT
IT WAS TOO LATE...



THE STRICKEN LANCASTER PLUNGED INTO A WHISPERING DIVE...THE TWO NIGHT FIGHTERS RETURNED RELENTLESSLY TO THE ATTACK...



LOOK OUT, SKIPPER!
THEY'RE COMING IN AGAIN! GET
READY TO CORKSCREW!...HEY, TAIL-
GUNNER...ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? TAIL
GUNNER, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

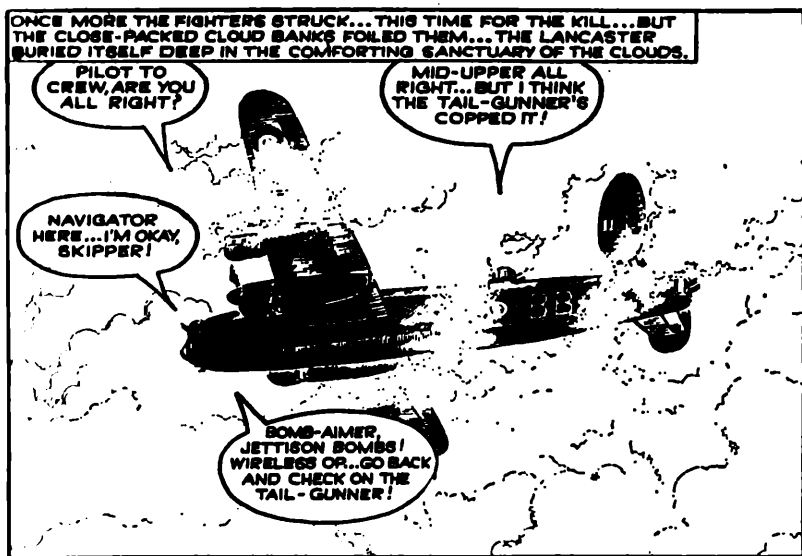
ONCE MORE THE FIGHTERS STRUCK... THIS TIME FOR THE KILL...BUT THE CLOSE-PACKED CLOUD BANKS FOILED THEM... THE LANCASTER BURIED ITSELF DEEP IN THE COMFORTING SANCTUARY OF THE CLOUDS.

PILOT TO
CREW, ARE YOU
ALL RIGHT?

MID-UPPER ALL
RIGHT...BUT I THINK
THE TAIL-GUNNER'S
COPPED IT!

NAVIGATOR
HERE...I'M OKAY,
SKIPPER!

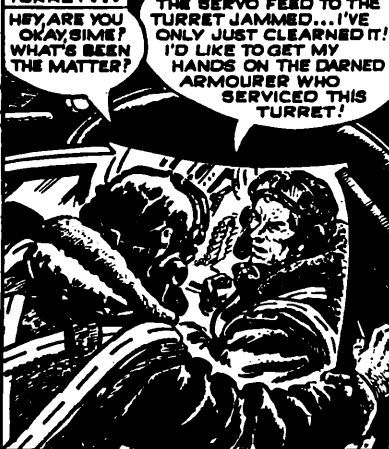
BOMB-AIMER,
JETTISON BOMBS!
WIRELESS OP...GO BACK
AND CHECK ON THE
TAIL-GUNNER!



WITH THE BOMBS JETTISONED, THE LIMPING LANCASTER HAD A CHANCE TO RETURN SAFELY... BUT ONLY IF THE CLOUDS WOULD SHELTER THEM, UNTIL THE DUTCH COAST WAS CROSSED.



BY THE TIME THE WIRELESS OPERATOR STUMBLED DOWN THE FUSELAGE, SIME HAD REGAINED SOME OF HIS CONTROL AND WAS BACK IN HIS SEAT IN THE REAR TURRET...



WITH THE WIND ROARING INTO THE SHATTERED FUSELAGE, IT WAS NO TIME TO LISTEN TO EXPLANATIONS... THE WIRELESS OPERATOR STAGGERED BACK TO HIS POSITION TO CONTACT BASE FOR A BEARING FOR HOME. LOSING HEIGHT AND WITH ONE ENGINE WRITTEN OFF, THE LANCASTER CAME IN TO LAND TWO HOURS LATER...



THE PILOT BROUGHT THE BATTERED AIRCRAFT GENTLY DOWN. THEY TAXIED AROUND THE PERIMETER TRACK TO THEIR DISPERSAL POINT. SIME HAD LONG SINCE DECIDED ON THE LINE HE WAS GOING TO TAKE...HE REHEARSED IN HIS MIND WHAT HE INTENDED TO DO...



AS ALWAYS THE FAITHFUL GROUND-CREW WERE WAITING FOR THEIR AIRCRAFT. AS THE COUGHING ENGINES CUT, THE FIRST MAN TO LEAP OUT WAS SIME, EAGER TO CLEAR HIMSELF OF HIS COWARDICE BY LAYING THE BLAME ON THE ARMOURER...



FEAR AND THE DESIRE TO JUSTIFY HIS COWARDICE FANNED SIME'S ANGER UNTIL HE ALMOST BELIEVED THAT GREGG HAD REALLY NEGLECTED HIS JOB...HE STUTTERED WITH RAGE...

THAT'LL DO, SIME! IF ANYONE HAS NEGLECTED HIS JOB HE'LL SUFFER FOR IT...BUT UNTIL WE'VE HAD A LOOK AT THE TROUBLE JUST YOU BUTTON UP! COME ON, GREGG, LET'S GO AND CHECK THE SERVO FEED!

YOU'LL BE COURT-MARTIALLED FOR THIS, GREGG. SEE IF YOU'RE NOT!

OH, WRAP UP!



THE SERGEANT AND GREGG CHECKED THE SERVO AMMUNITION FEED...THE INGENIOUS DEVICE THAT FED BELTS OF AMMUNITION INTO THE REVOLVING TURRET...

LOOKS OKAY TO ME, GREGG! WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR A PROPER INSPECTION OF COURSE, BUT I'D BET MY BOOTS IT'S WORKING PERFECTLY! I KNOW THAT FELLER SIME...TAKE IT FROM ME, HE'S UP TO NO GOOD!

I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT, SARGE! BUT WHAT'S THE PAY OFF, THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW!



...AND THE
SERVANT WALKED
BACK TO THEIR
BARRACKS AS THE
DAWN BROKE
OVER THE LINCOLN
COUNTYSIDE...

I'VE HALF A MIND TO
GO RIGHT NOW AND REPORT
THIS TO THE C.O....
FAULTY SERVO-FEED
MY FOOT!

DON'T DO THAT,
SARGE! I'LL HAVE A
WORD WITH SOME
MYSELF...I'LL GET
TO THE BOTTOM
OF IT!



AFTER THAT DAY GREGG LEFT THE
ARMOURY AND MADE HIS WAY TO DAVE
RIME'S HUT...HE ENTERED WITHOUT
KNOCKING AND SHUT THE DOOR...

WHAT DO YOU
WANT, GREGG? DO
YOU WANT ME TO
CONGRATULATE
YOU FOR HAVING
MESSED UP
YOUR JOB? YOU
BIG HOLLYWOOD
HERO!

CUT THAT OUT!
I HAVEN'T GOT MUCH
TO SAY, BUT I ADVISE
YOU TO LISTEN TO
ME...VERY
CAREFULLY!



GREGG EXPLAINED CLEARLY AND COLDLY
THAT THE STORY OF THE JAMMED
SERVO-FEED WAS A DOWNRIGHT LIE. A
CHECK-UP BY THE ARMAMENTS OFFICER
THAT MORNING HAD SHOWN THAT
THE FEED WAS WORKING PROPERLY...

...LOOK, MAN! I KNOW YOU'VE GOT
A TOUGH JOB! MAYBE YOU'VE DONE TOO
MANY OPERATIONS! MAYBE YOUR
NERVE FAILED...THAT CAN HAPPEN
TO ANYONE! BUT DON'T TRY AND
PASS THE BUCK!



WHAT
THE HECK DO
YOU MEAN...
NERVE
FAILED? WHY
LET ME TELL
YOU...

BUT SIME'S BLUSTER COULD NOT STAND UP TO GREGG'S BLEAK STARE. WORDS STARTED TO FAIL HIM AND HIS ANGER SUDDENLY DEFLATED. HE COLLAPSED ON HIS BED, THE NERVE SHATTERED, EXHAUSTED MAN THAT HE WAS...

I DON'T KNOW... I CAN'T GO ON... I CAN'T GO AGAIN TONIGHT. ALL ALONE IN THE TAIL... WAITING... WAITING... AND SOONER OR LATER... OH, GOSH, YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND!

LOOK, DAVE... I DO UNDERSTAND! YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS BEEN SCARED!

GREGG TOLD SIME OF HIS OWN ORDEAL BY FEAR, AND HOW EVER SINCE HE HAD BEEN DESPERATELY WISHING FOR SOME OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE THAT HE WASN'T A COWARD...

...I'D GIVE MY RIGHT ARM TO FLY ON AN OPERATION AS A TAIL GUNNER! CAN'T I GO INSTEAD OF YOU TONIGHT?

DON'T BE A FOOL! WHY, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO GIVE EVADING ACTION, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO ALLOW DEFLECTION WHEN YOU SHOOT...

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT! I KNOW MORE THAN YOU REALISE ALREADY... AND YOU'RE GOING TO FILL IN THE GAPS!

MAD AS GREGG'S IDEA WAS... HE WAS SOON ABLE TO TALK SIME INTO BEING A PARTY TO THE SWITCH-OVER.

...I'VE LISTENED IN AT GUNNERY LECTURES...AND I KNOW ALL ABOUT TURRETS... I BET I COULD BEAT YOU AT SHOOTING ANY DAY/COME ON, WHAT DO YOU SAY?

OKAY, GREGG! YOU MUST BE MAD... WE BOTH MUST BE MAD... I'M PAST CARING ANYWAY! COME BACK IN AN HOUR'S TIME AND I'LL BRIEF YOU!



AS GREGG LEFT SIME'S HUT HE LOOKED OUT OVER THE AIRFIELD... THE GROUND CREWS WERE ALREADY AT WORK PREPARING THE GREAT BOMBERS FOR THE NIGHT'S OPERATION... AT LAST HE WAS TO BE A PART OF IT ALL. WOULD HE GET AWAY WITH IT? WOULD HE AND SIME END UP BEFORE A COURT-MARTIAL? THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS WOULD SHOW...

...THIS IS REALLY STICKING MY NECK OUT!



Chapter 3. THE SWITCH-OVER

A FEW HOURS LATER IN SIME'S BILLET, GREGG WAS BRIEFED IN HIS DUTIES...HOW TO REPORT ACCURATELY AN APPROACHING FIGHTER...HOW TO GIVE PRECISE AND CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS SO THAT THE PILOT MIGHT APPLY IMMEDIATE EVASIVE ACTION. HOW TO SEARCH THE NIGHT SKY...IN FACT A REAR GUNNER'S COURSE IN TWO HOURS...



SIME HAD GIVEN GREGG ONLY THE BARE OUTLINE OF HIS JOB...BUT A GREATER PROBLEM CONFRONTED THEM BOTH...HOW TO INSTAL GREGG IN THE REAR TURRET WITHOUT THE REST OF THE CREW KNOWING...



GREGG LEFT SIME AND WENT OVER AND OVER THE MANY THINGS HE WOULD HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT NIGHT. THE SINKING FEELING IN HIS STOMACH INCREASED AS HE HEARD THE TANNON CALLING THE CREWS TO BRIEFING...



THAT NIGHT THE MIGHTY ARM OF BOMBER COMMAND WAS REACHING DEEPER INTO ENEMY TERRITORY THAN IT HAD EVER DONE BEFORE... THE TARGET WAS SPEZIA, ITALY... THE GULF OF GENOA...



THE MET. MAN WAS AS USUAL OPTIMISTIC. VISIBILITY WOULD BE GOOD ON THE WAY OVER, BUT ON THE WAY BACK THERE WAS A DANGER OF COLD FRONTS NOW MOVING IN FROM THE ATLANTIC...

...OTHERWISE, GENTLEMEN... THE WEATHER SHOULD GIVE YOU A GOOD TRIP!

HE CERTAINLY KNOWS HOW TO DRESS IT UP FOR US.

I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF HAVING TO USE ALL THAT POWER TO CLIMB OVER THE ALPS ON THE WAY HOME! IF WE'VE ANY TROUBLE WE'LL BE DEAD DUCKS!

THE TIME FOR TAKE-OFF DREW NEAR AND THE BUSES STOOD BY AT THE FLIGHT OFFICES TO TAKE THE CREWS TO THEIR AIRCRAFT...

WELL...THIS IS IT! HERE I GO! TOO LATE TO BACK OUT NOW!

HALF AN HOUR LATER SIME AND THE REST OF THE CREW APPROACHED THEIR LANCASTER. THE FITTERS HAD WORKED OVER-TIME TO HAVE HER READY FOR THE TRIP. SIME WAITED FOR HIS OPPORTUNITY TO SLIP OFF INTO THE DARKNESS.

... BY THE WAY, SIME, THE ARMAMENTS OFFICER TOLD ME THAT YOUR SERVO-FEED WAS ALL RIGHT WHEN HE TESTED IT! SEE THAT YOU DON'T HAVE THE SAME TROUBLE TONIGHT!

SORRY, SKIPPER, IT WAS PROBABLY AN EMPTY CARTRIDGE CASE JAMMING IT. I'LL SEE IT'S OKAY THIS TRIP!



THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT WAS BROKEN BY THE COUGHING ROAR OF MERLIN ENGINES AS THE SQUADRON STARTED UP ONE BY ONE. WHILE THE GROUNDCREWS WERE OCCUPIED WITH STARTING, DAVE SIME SLIPPED OFF INTO THE SHADOWS...

THERE GOES
SIME...AND HERE
I AM.

PILOT TO
TAIL GUNNER,
TEST YOUR TURRET
MECHANISM!

ROGER,
SKIPPER!

HAVING HAD HIS FIRST ORDER FROM THE PILOT, GREGG FELT BETTER. THE TURRET WORKED PERFECTLY. AFTER RUNNING UP THE ENGINES THE LANCASTER TAXIED OUT OF DISPERAL...

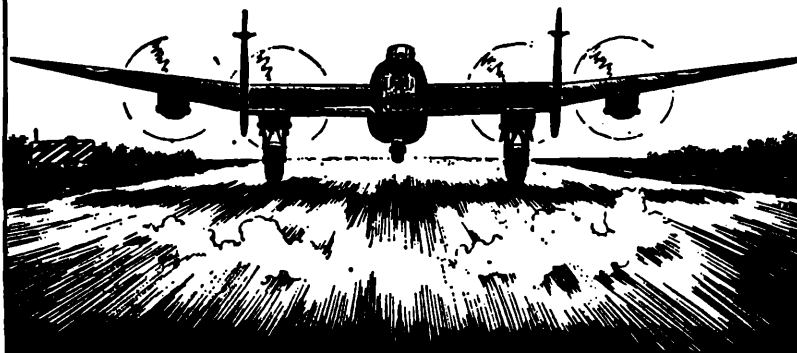
LET'S
HOPE OUR TAIL
GUNNER'S NOT GOING
TO LET US DOWN
TONIGHT!

TOO RIGHT,
SKIPPER! I RECKON
THAT THIS TRIP IS
GOING TO BE ANOTHER
NIGHT FOR ENEMY
FIGHTERS!

THEY WERE NOW AT THE END OF THE RUNWAY... THE THROTTLES WERE SLOWLY BEING OPENED... THE GREAT MACHINE THROBBED WITH POWER. THIS WAS IT... IT WAS TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW.

RIGHT,
ENGINEER! FULL
POWER!

FULL
POWER
COMING UP,
SKIPPER!



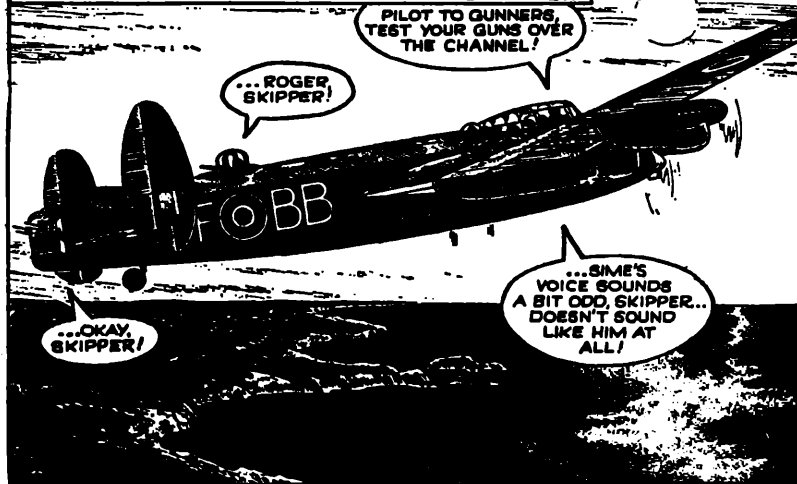
THE TRIP HAD BEEN WELL PLANNED. ON THE SHORT RUHR TRIPS, THE SQUADRON WOULD CLIMB OVER BASE TO OPERATIONAL HEIGHT... 20,000 FT. BUT NOW THEY GAINED HEIGHT GENTLY ON THE FIRST LEG OF THE JOURNEY OVER OCCUPIED FRANCE...

PILOT TO GUNNERS,
TEST YOUR GUNS OVER
THE CHANNEL!

...ROGER
SKIPPER!

...OKAY,
SKIPPER!

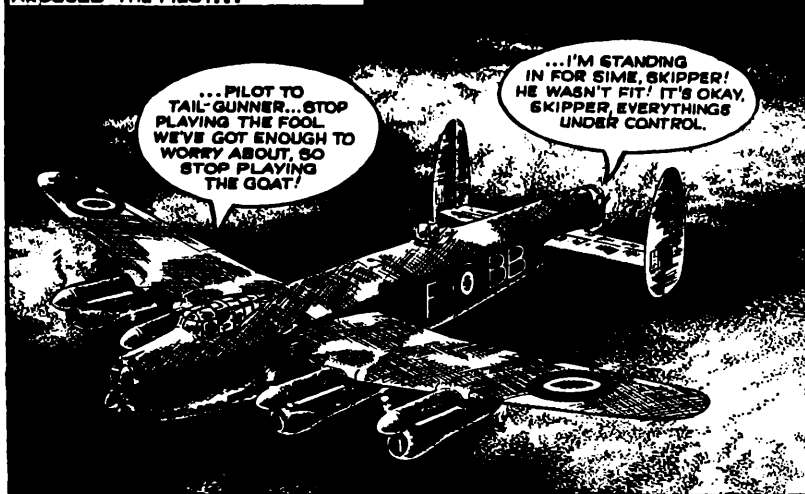
...SIME'S
VOICE SOUNDS
A BIT ODD, SKIPPER...
DOESN'T SOUND
LIKE HIM AT
ALL!



THE PILOT, WHO HAD BEEN CONCENTRATING ON HIS INSTRUMENTS, HAD NOT NOTICED THE DIFFERENCE IN THE VOICE OF HIS TAIL-GUNNER...



THE FLIGHT ENGINEER'S SUSPICIONS AROUSED THE PILOT...



THERE WERE A FEW SECONDS OF COLD SILENCE. GREGG AND THE REST OF THE CREW WAITED FOR THEIR PILOT'S OUTBURST. IT WASN'T LONG COMING...



REPORT TO ME, WHOEVER YOU ARE! NOW! MAKE IT SNAPPY! STANDING IN, ARE YOU, BY THUNDER? I'M GOING TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS!

WRIGGLING HIMSELF FROM THE TURRET, GREGG MADE HIS WAY TO THE PILOT'S COCKPIT. THE PILOT WAS IN A TOWERING RAGE.

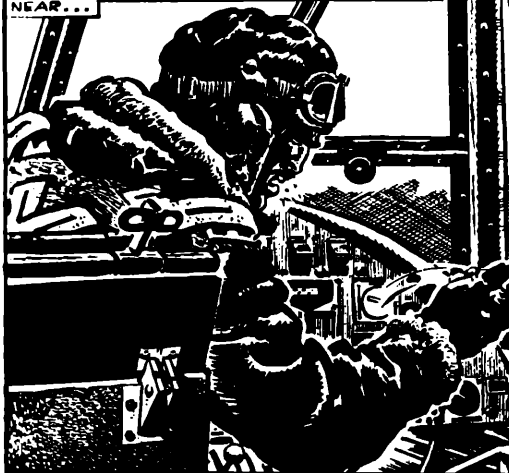


L.A.C. GREGG, SIR!

WELL, WHO ARE YOU?

WELL, SIR, I AM AN ARMOURER AND I KNOW QUITE A BIT OF THE DRILL.

FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES THE PILOT LASHED GREGG WITH HIS TONGUE. BUT IT WAS NO TIME FOR WORDS. THE ENEMY COAST WAS DRAWING NEAR...



...GET BACK INTO THAT TURRET! KEEP YOUR EYES SKINNED! I'LL SEE YOU AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER! BELIEVE ME...YOU AND MISTER SIME ARE GOING TO WISH YOU'D NEVER BEEN BORN!



THE PILOT REALISED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF A BAD JOB. GREGG RETURNED TO THE TURRET AND SEARCHED THE EMPTY SKY FOR NIGHT-FIGHTERS UNTIL HIS EYEBALLS ACHED...



TAIL-GUNNER TO PILOT. EVERYTHING LOOKS PRETTY QUIET.

EVERYTHING WAS PRETTY QUIET. THE GERMAN NIGHT-FIGHTER FORCE WAS CONCENTRATED ON THE APPROACHES TO THE RUHR. THE GREAT FORCE OF BOMBERS THUNDERED OVER OCCUPIED FRANCE WITH NO OPPOSITION, AND THE FRENCH ALPS SOON STARTED TO PASS BENEATH THEM...



ANOTHER HALF-HOUR SHOULD SEE US OVER THE TARGET THEN.

IN FIVE MINUTES WE SHOULD BE OVER MONT BLANC! THEN ALTER COURSE TO 125°!

GREGG PEERED OUT OF THE TURRET...THE GIGANTIC PEAKS OF THE ALPS PASSED BENEATH...IF ANYTHING WENT WRONG NOW...IF A FIGHTER ATTACKED, OR AN ENGINE CUT...THE SWIFT-MOVING MOUNTAIN AIR CURRENTS WOULD CLAIM THEM...

...IT CERTAINLY IS LONELY SITTING HERE...JUST WAITING! I'M BEGINNING TO FEEL SORRY FOR POOR OLD SIME!

SUDDENLY THE OMINOUS TICKING OF MONICA BROKE IN ON GREGG'S THOUGHTS...HE SEARCHED THE CRYSTAL-CLEAR SKY FRANTICALLY...THEN HE SAW THE ENEMY. SIME'S INSTRUCTIONS CAME BACK TO HIM...

HELLO, PILOT, FIGHTER, FIGHTER! COMING IN ON THE STARBOARD SIDE, AT 900 YARDS... PREPARE TO DIVE TO STARBOARD!

THE FOCKE WULF 190 CLOSED IN. GREGG'S MOUTH DRIED UP...A COLD SWEAT BROKE OUT ON HIS FACE. THIS WAS IT! COULD HE TAKE IT?

...DIVE TO STARBOARD... GO!

THOUGH GREGG'S FIRST BURST OF FIRE WENT WIDE OF THE FIGHTER, IT SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THE JERRY THINK TWICE. THE F.W.40 WENT ROUND AGAIN...

WAIT TILL YOU SEE THE WHITES OF HIS EYES, TAIL-GUNNER! THEN LET HIM HAVE IT

WE'LL GET HIM NEXT TIME! PREPARE TO DIVE TO STARBOARD AGAIN!

BUT THIS TIME THE FOCKE WULF WAS OUT FOR THE KILL.

HE'S COMING IN, EIGHT HUNDRED, SEVEN HUNDRED... DIVE TO STARBOARD ... GO!

OKAY, TAIL-GUNNER, GIVE HIM THE WORKS!

AS THE FIGHTER'S CANNON SHELLS SCREAMED PAST THE TURRET, GREGG TOOK CAREFUL AIM AND PRESSED THE TRIGGERS...



THE FIGHTER REARED UP SUDDENLY WITH ORANGE FLAME BELLYING OUT OF THE ENGINE.



AS THE FIGHTER PLUMMETED INTO A SNOW-BOUND VALLEY... THE LANCASTER FOUGHT TO REGAIN HEIGHT. THEY HAD LOST FIVE THOUSAND FEET AND WERE ALMOST LEVEL WITH THE ALPINE PEAKS...

...GOOD SHOW, TAIL GUNNER! GIVE ME MORE REVS, ENGINEER... I NEED THEM BADLY... VERY BADLY!

...REVS COMING UP... BUT TAKE IT EASY SKIPPER, WE'LL NEED ALL WE HAVE ON THE WAY OUT!

THEY REGAINED SAFETY HEIGHT, SLOWLY THE MOUNTAINS FELL AWAY BENEATH THEM. THEY WERE ENTERING THE PLAIN OF LOMBARDY... THE GULF OF GENOA GLEAMED A HUNDRED MILES AHEAD...

...PILOT TO CREW! WE'RE NOW OVER SUNNY ITALY! TARGET AHEAD! GIVE US A COURSE, NAVIGATOR!

CHANGE COURSE 045° E.T.A. FIFTEEN MINUTES FROM NOW!

NEITHER THE INHABITANTS NOR THE DEFENDERS OF THE PORT OF SPEZIA WERE PREPARED FOR THE GREAT FORCE THAT SURGED DOWN FROM THE ALPS. THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCES WERE AT FIRST SILENT...

THIS CAN'T BE THE TARGET, SKIPPER, THERE'S NO FLAK!

DON'T BE TOO SURE...GET READY FOR THE RUN IN!

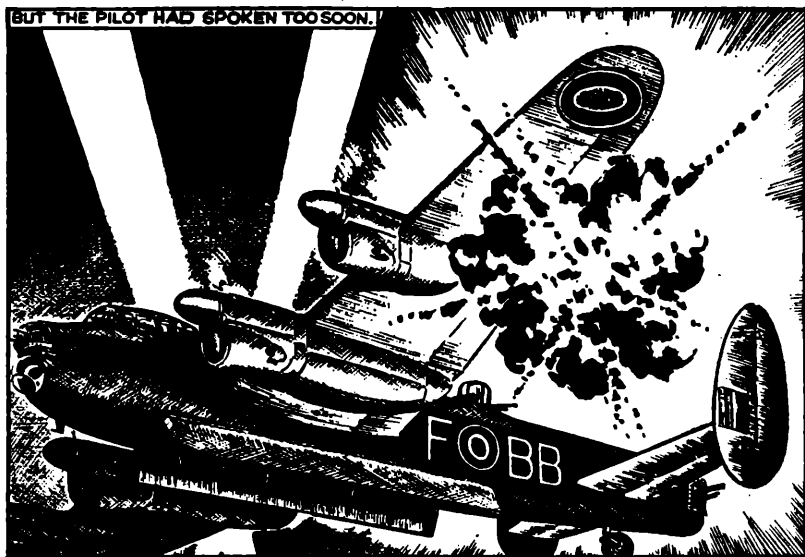
AS THE BOMB DOORS OPENED THE FLAK STARTED TO PUMP UP INTO THE CLEAR MEDITERRANEAN SKY. CLUSTERS OF FLAK BURSTS FOLLOWED THE LANCASTER ON ITS RUN UP...

HELLO, SKIPPER, TAIL GUNNER HERE! THE FLAK IS RIGHT ON OUR TAIL!

KEEP YOUR HAIR ON, TAIL GUNNER! YOU WAIT TILL YOU'VE SEEN HAPPY VALLEY! THIS IS A CAKE WALK!

BOMBS GOING NOW, SKIPPER!

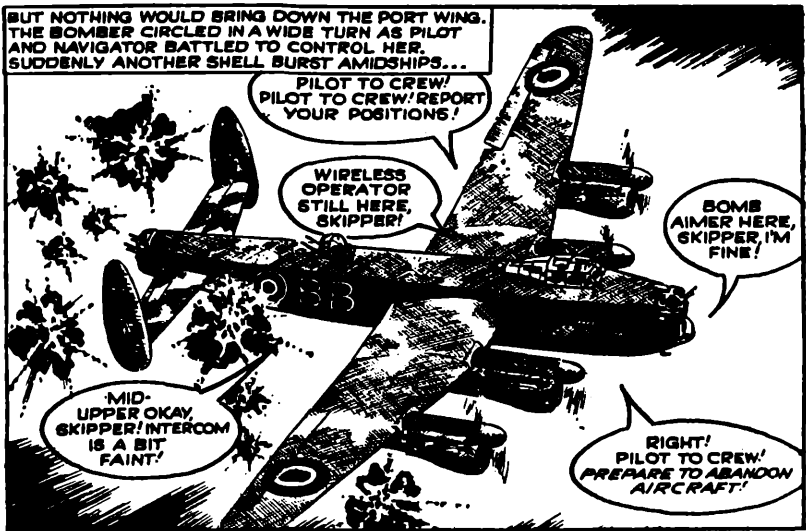
BUT THE PILOT HAD SPOKEN TOO SOON.



THE BOMBER SLEWED OVER LIKE A WOUNDED BIRD...



BUT NOTHING WOULD BRING DOWN THE PORT WING. THE BOMBER CIRCLED IN A WIDE TURN AS PILOT AND NAVIGATOR BATTLED TO CONTROL HER. SUDDENLY ANOTHER SHELL BURST AMIDSHIPS...



IN THE REAR TURRET GREGG HAD HEARD THE SECOND FLAK-BURST HIT THE FUSELAGE. HIS INTERCOM INSTANTLY WENT DEAD. HE WAS NOW CUT OFF FROM THE REST OF HIS CREW. HE TURNED THE TURRET RIGHT AROUND TO PORT TO SEE IF HE COULD DETECT SIGNS OF FIRE...

HELLO, TAIL GUNNER, REPORT, PLEASE! OVER!

HE'S TURNED HIS TURRET TO THE ABANDON AIRCRAFT POSITION, SKIPPER! HE'S ON HIS WAY OUT, I THINK! HE PROBABLY UNPLUGGED HIS INTERCOM BEFORE BALING OUT!

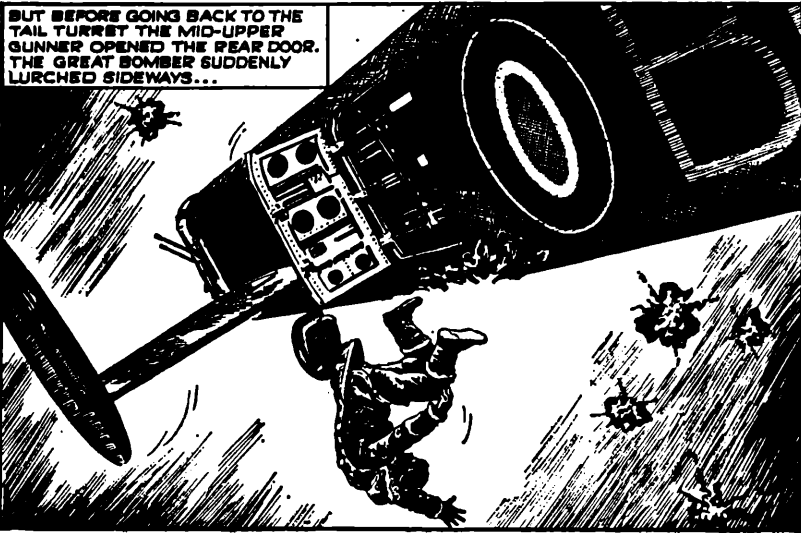


IN EITHER OF THE PORT OR STARBOARD BEAM POSITIONS, A REAR GUNNER COULD JETTISON THE TURRET DOORS AND THEN BY MERELY LEANING OVER BACKWARDS BALE OUT.

PILOT TO CREW! ABANDON AIRCRAFT! ABANDON AIRCRAFT! MID-UPPER GUNNER, CHECK ON THE TAIL GUNNER BEFORE YOU LEAVE!



BUT BEFORE GOING BACK TO THE TAIL TURRET THE MID-UPPER GUNNER OPENED THE REAR DOOR. THE GREAT BOMBER SUDDENLY LURCHED SIDWAYS...



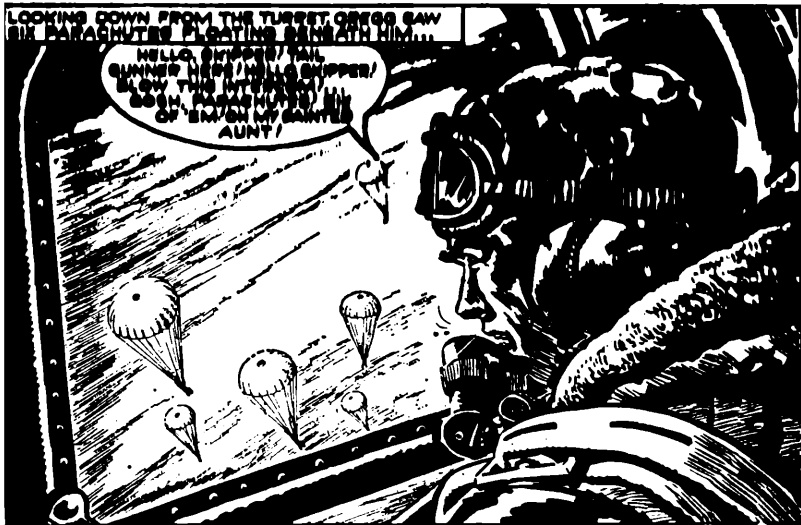
THE PILOT WAITED UNTIL THE CREW HAD BALED OUT. HE CALLED UP THE REAR GUNNER AND THE MID-UPPER GUNNER...NO REPLY.

OKAY, CHAPS! I'M JUST GOING TO BALE OUT MYSELF! I HOPE YOU'VE ALL GONE!



LOOKING DOWN FROM THE TURRET OREGO SAW SIX PARASHUTES FLOATING BENEATH HIM...

HELLO, SNIPPER! TAIL GUNNER HERE! HELLO SNIPPER! BLOW THIS INTERESTING! BOON, PARASHUTES! HE OF EM ON MY SAVED AUNT!



Chapter 4. LONE TRIP HOME

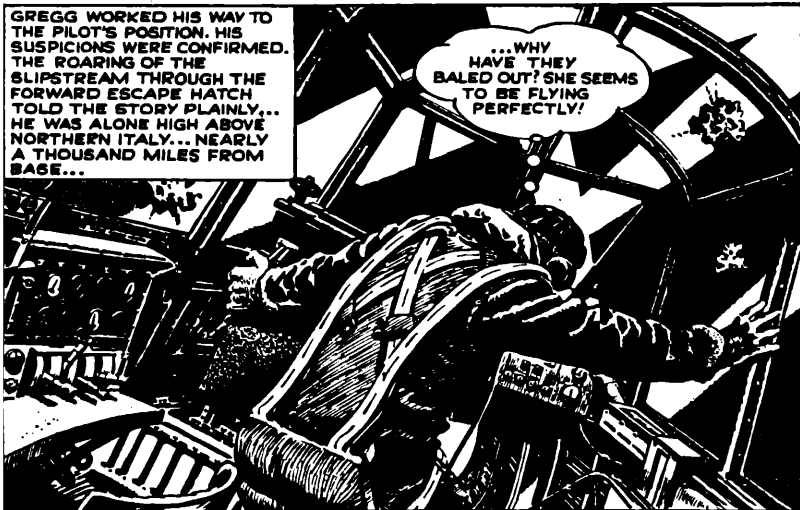
A SUSPICION THAT WAS ALMOST A CERTAINTY FRAMED ITSELF IN GREGG'S MIND. HE BROUGHT THE TURRET TO THE STERN POSITION, OPENED THE DOORS AND PEERED INTO THE FUSELAGE...

... THE MID-UPPER'S NOT IN HIS TURRET... I CAN'T SEE THE NAVIGATOR EITHER...



GREGG WORKED HIS WAY TO THE PILOT'S POSITION. HIS SUSPICIONS WERE CONFIRMED. THE ROARING OF THE SLIPSTREAM THROUGH THE FORWARD ESCAPE HATCH TOLD THE STORY PLAINLY... HE WAS ALONE HIGH ABOVE NORTHERN ITALY... NEARLY A THOUSAND MILES FROM BASE...

... WHY HAVE THEY BALED OUT? SHE SEEMS TO BE FLYING PERFECTLY!



ONCE IN THE PILOT'S SEAT GREGG GINGERLY TRIED OUT THE CONTROLS. SOMETHING SEEMED TO BE JAMMING THE AILERON CONTROL. AS HE WRESTLED WITH THE STICK, THE AIRCRAFT WAS SUDDENLY BUFFETED BY A POWERFUL UP-CURRENT... THE WHOLE AIRFRAME JUDDERED...

OH, MY GOSH!



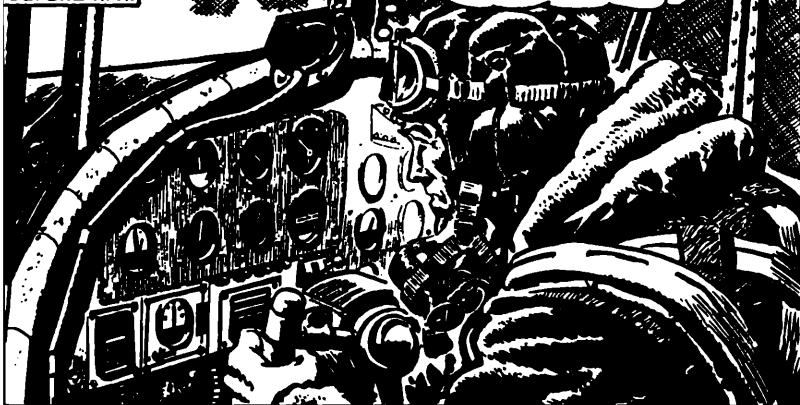
TO GREGG'S SURPRISE THE LANCASTER DID NOT PLUNGE EARTHWARD. IT YAWED VIOLENTLY THREE TIMES... THEN WITHOUT WARNING... THE PORT WING RIGHTED ITSELF...

HOLY SMOKE! THE AILERON'S NOT JAMMED NOW! I CAN TAKE HER HOME IF I WANT TO! IF I WANT TO, THAT'S FUNNY! I'VE GOT TO GET HOME!



ONCE DECIDED, GREGG CHECKED THE DETAILS OF HIS POSITION... HEIGHT 12,000 FT... AIR SPEED 250 KNOTS... COURSE 010°... POSITION ABOUT FIFTY MILES NORTH OF THE TARGET AREA... HE LOOKED WITH HORROR AT THE INSTRUMENTS ON THE PANEL BEFORE HIM.

I'LL JUST KEEP MY EYE ON THE THREE MAIN INSTRUMENTS... ALTIMETER... AIR SPEED INDICATOR... AND ARTIFICIAL HORIZON! THE OTHERS I'LL JUST FORGET ABOUT! WHY DID I STICK MY NECK OUT? I RECKON I'D BETTER FLY A COURSE OF 340°, I SHOULD HIT ENGLAND SOMEWHERE!



HE FOUND THE GREAT AIRCRAFT SURPRISINGLY LIGHT ON THE CONTROLS. BY APPLYING SOME OF THE FACTS HE HAD LEARNED AT HIS ELEMENTARY FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL HE WAS ABLE TO KEEP ON COURSE... AND AT THE SAME TIME WAS ABLE TO GAIN HEIGHT GRADUALLY... THIS WAS IMPORTANT. THE ALPS WERE NOT FAR AHEAD AND THEIR SAFETY HEIGHT WAS 17,000 FT.

THIS IS FINE!
EVERYTHING UNDER
CONTROL!



CLIMB OVER THIS FRONT! THAT MEANS AT LEAST ANOTHER THREE THOUSAND FEET! WELL, HERE WE GO!

AS GREGG OPENED THE TRUNK OF HIS CAR IN LANCASTER RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF SLIMS INDICATED BY THE SIGN-POST WAS CLIMBING INTO THE CAR AND WAS HEARD TO SAY "I'VE GOT A FEELING ABOUT THIS PLACE."



THE LANCASTER SHOOK ITSELF FREE OF THE FIRST WREATHS OF THE STORM CLOUDS. BENEATH HIM GREGG SAW A SOFT COTTON WOOL SEA OF CLOUD. WAS THIS SAFETY AT LAST?

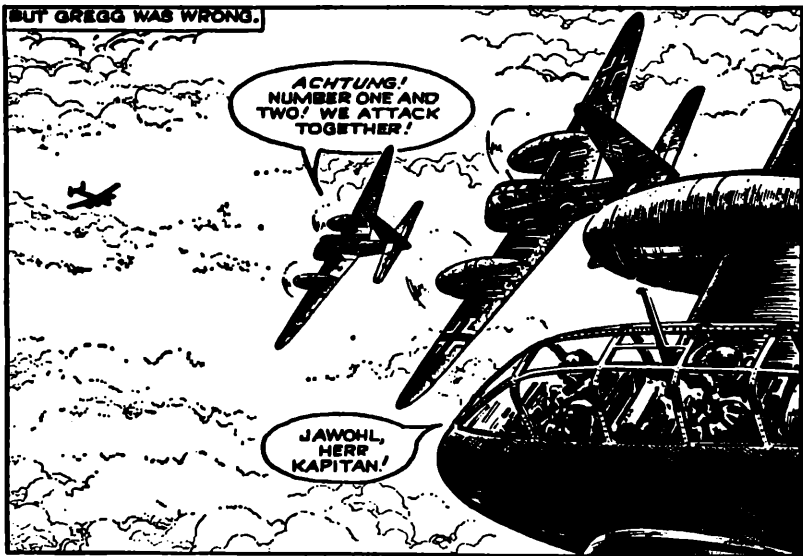
TWENTY FOUR THOUSAND FEET! THAT SHOULD BE OUT OF THE REACH OF THE FIGHTER BOYS!



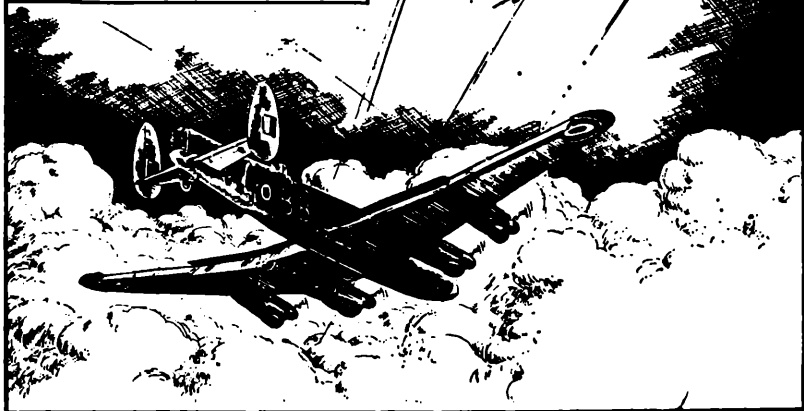
BUT GREGG WAS WRONG.

ACHTUNG!
NUMBER ONE AND
TWO! WE ATTACK
TOGETHER!

JAWOHL,
HERR
KAPITAN!



THE FIRST THAT GREGG KNEW OF THE ATTACK WAS TO SEE THE TRACER STREAKING ABOVE HIM. HE REACTED INSTINCTIVELY... HE THRUST THE STICK WELL FORWARD AND PLUNGED THE AIRCRAFT INTO THE TURMOIL OF STORM CLOUDS BENEATH HIM...



BUT ALTHOUGH THE CLOUDS SHELTERED HIM FROM THE ENEMY, HE WAS IN THE LINE OF A VICIOUS SNIPER. THE TRACER STREAKED AT HIM AND HE PLUNGED THE AIRCRAFT INTO THE TURMOIL OF STORM CLOUDS BENEATH HIM...



MUCH MORE OF THIS AND SHE'LL BREAK UP! MUST CLIMB OUT... STICK BACK... OPEN THROTTLES... INCREASE PITCH! IF I EVER GET OUT OF THIS I'LL NEVER FLY AGAIN!

BUT GREGG HAD HAILED THE STICK TOO FAR BACK... SHE WAS LOSING SPEED... 180... 125... 100... 95... SHE REACHED STALLING SPEED, LIKE A WHIPLASH THE GREAT LANCASTER FELL INTO A VICIOUS SPIN.

OH... MY... GOSH!
I'M IN A SPIN! SHE'S
OUT OF CONTROL! I CAN'T
PULL HER OUT! WHAT
DO I DO...?

FOR A FEW MOMENTS PANIC GRIPPED GREGG, THEN SUDDENLY SOMETHING SEEMED TO SNAP IN HIS MIND... HE REMEMBERED THE WORDS OF HIS FIRST INSTRUCTOR...

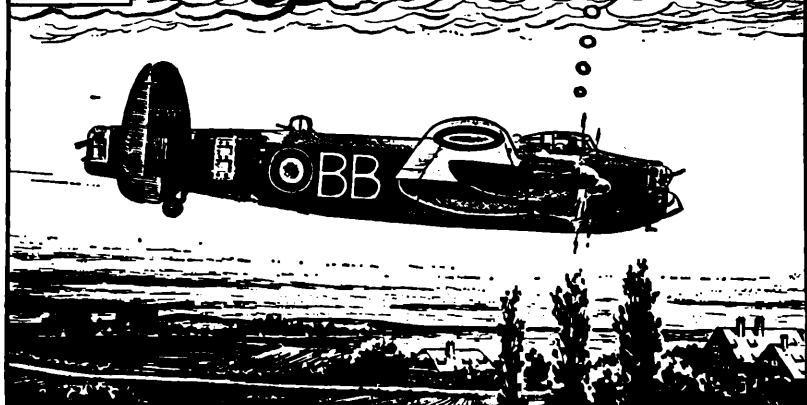
CENTRALIZE
THE RUDDER! OPEN
THE THROTTLE...
PULL THE STICK BACK!
THAT'S THE DRILL!
YES, THAT'S THE
DRILL!

SO HE OBEYED THE TIME-HONOURED RULES FOR COMING OUT OF A SPIN. THE GREAT WEIGHT OF GRAVITY PRESSED HIM DOWN AS THE LANCASTER PULLED SLOWLY OUT OF ITS SPIN.

YAARGH!
I MUSTN'T
BLACK OUT!

THE SPIN HAD COST A LOT OF HEIGHT AND HAD TAKEN THE LANCASTER UNDERNEATH THE FRONT. LUCKILY GREGG WAS NOW OVER THE COMPARATIVE FLAT COUNTRY OF FRANCE. HE WAS OFF COURSE AND THE GROUND BENEATH WAS OBSCURED IN DARKNESS. HE TURNED ON COURSE AND CONCENTRATED ON HIS INSTRUMENTS. HE HOPED FERVENTLY THAT HE WASN'T DIRECTED TOWARDS GERMANY.

...AND LET'S HOPE THE FIGHTERS LEAVE ME ALONE...OR ELSE I'M A DEAD DUCK!



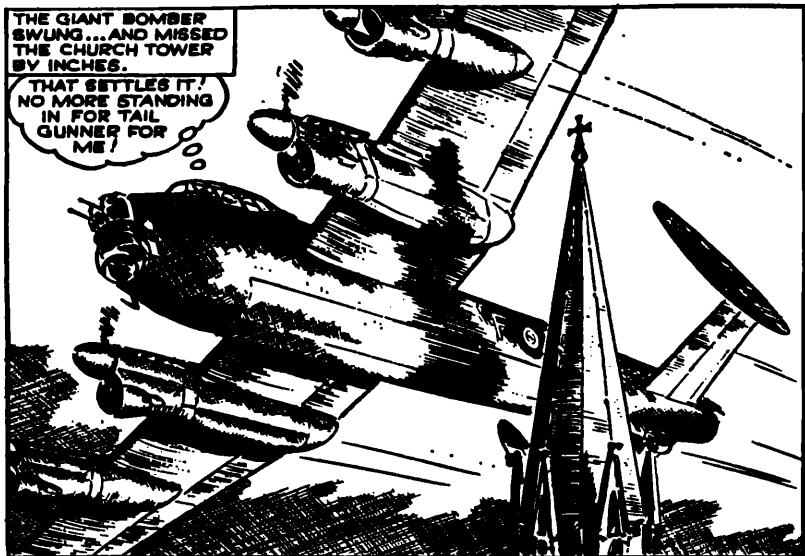
THE COAST OF FRANCE WAS APPROACHING. GREGG COULD JUST DISCERN THE OUTLINE AGAINST THE TOTAL BLACKNESS OF THE LAND BENEATH HIM. A LIGHT FLAK BATTERY OPENED UP. GREGG PUT THE NOSE DOWN AND SUDDENLY...

GREAT SCOTT!
I'M NEARLY ON THE DECK!



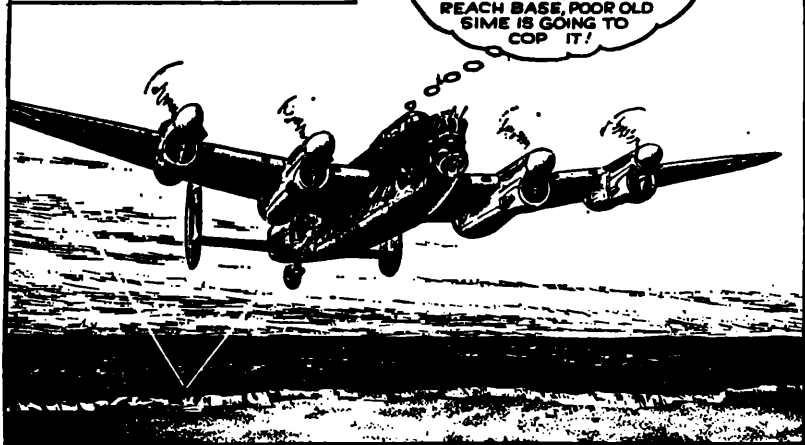
THE GIANT BOMBER
SWUNG...AND MISSED
THE CHURCH TOWER
BY INCHES.

THAT SETTLES IT!
NO MORE STANDING
IN FOR TAIL
GUNNER FOR
ME!



AT LAST HE REACHED THE COAST.
AS JIMMY GREGG FLEW OVER THE
SEA HE TRIED TO GAIN HEIGHT,
BUT WAS AFRAID TO CLIMB TOO
HIGH AS PETROL MUST BE LOW...

THE QUESTION IS... WHAT AM
I GOING TO DO NOW? DO I LAND AT
THE FIRST AERODROME?...OR
SHALL I CALL BASE TO GIVE
ME A COURSE? IF I DON'T
REACH BASE, POOR OLD
TIME IS GOING TO
COP IT!



LAND LOOMED AHEAD OF HIM. GREGG RECOGNIZED AT ONCE THAT THEY WERE APPROACHING THE ISLE OF WIGHT. HE GRABBED THE NAVIGATOR'S CHART FROM HIS TABLE AND WORKED OUT A ROUGH COURSE FOR BASE.

THE COURSE SHOULD BE 013°... NOW LET'S SAY THE WIND IS THE SAME AS THE LAST NAVIGATOR'S CHECK... H'M... OH, WELL, I'LL FLY 025° AND HOPE FOR THE BEST!

AFTER ANOTHER HOUR'S FLYING GREGG SAW THE FANT OUTLINE OF THE WASH OVER THE STARBOARD QUARTER. HE SCANNED THE NIGHT DESPERATELY FOR THE AERODROME BEACON. YES, THERE IT WAS FLASHING... SHORT, SHORT, SHORT... HE'D MADE IT.

... NOW COMES THE TOUGHEST PART OF ALL! GETTING HER ON THE DECK... IN ONE PIECE!

HE REMEMBERED THE AERODROME R.T. CALL-SIGN, BUT WAS VERY UNCERTAIN OF HOW TO PROCEED ON THE R.T. AS HE CLICKED IT OVER TO TRANSMIT.

WELL, HERE GOES! HELLO, BREWING CONTROL! HELLO! THIS IS NICKRA & FREDDIE. ARE YOU RECEIVING ME, OVER!

HELLO NICKRA & FREDDIE! RECEIVING YOU LOUD AND CLEAR. OVER!

THE NEXT ANNOUNCEMENT
SHOOK THE FLYING CONTROL
PERSONNEL...

HELLO BEEZWING! HELLO BEEZWING!
THIS IS NICKRA F. FREDDIE! THIS IS THE
TAIL GUNNER CALLING ... GIVE ME
INSTRUCTIONS AS TO HOW TO LAND
THIS CRATE! I CAN'T BALE OUT...
CAN'T REACH MY PARACHUTE...
I MUST... REPEAT MUST...
LAND... I'M SHORT OF
PETROL, SO HURRY!



IN TENSE SILENCE THE FLYING CONTROL
PERSONNEL HEARD THE DUTY PILOT
GIVING HIS INSTRUCTIONS...

LISTEN, CAREFULLY, 'F' FREDDIE!
TURN INTO THE WIND... TRY AND BE
AT SOOFT WHEN YOU TURN! THEN PUT
THE FLAPS DOWN! YOU'LL FIND THE
FLAP LEVER MARKED WITH A
GREEN LIGHT! BRING THE POWER
BACK TO ZERO BOOST! AND SEE
THAT HER SPEED DOESN'T
DROP BELOW 96 KNOTS!
I'LL REPEAT THAT!



**SLOWLY GREGG MANOEUVERED THE LANCASTER
ROUND UNTIL THE FLARE PATH LAY BENEATH HIM,
A MILE AHEAD.**

**YOU'RE DOING
FINE! KEEP THAT
RATE OF DESCENT!
REMEMBER IF
YOU PRANG...CUT
THE ENGINE
SWITCHES ABOVE
YOUR HEAD!**

**OKAY, FLAPS
DOWN!...ZERO BOOST...
OKAY! SHE'S ON ZERO
BOOST!...SPEED
100 KNOTS!**

**GREGG'S MOUTH WAS DRY AND HIS HEART
POUNDED AS THE FLARE PATH LOOMED
NEARER AND NEARER... SUDDENLY IT WAS
RIGHT AHEAD OF HIS... ANOTHER FEW
FEET WOULD SEE HIM ON THE DECK.**

**WHAT DO
I DO NOW? WHAT
DO I DO
NOW?**

**CUT THE
THROTTLES!
CUT THE
THROTTLES!**

AS THE LANCASTER ROLLED SLOWLY TO A STANDSTILL AT THE END OF THE RUNWAY, THE C.O.'S CAR RUSHED TO THE SCENE. WEARILY GREGG CLIMBED OUT. THEY MUSTN'T RECOGNIZE HIM. HE MUST GET TO SIME'S BILLET. BUT WAS IT TOO LATE?

GREAT SHOW! REALLY FIRST RATE EFFORT! YOU'RE SERGEANT SIME, AREN'T YOU?

YESSIR!

GOOD! WELL, HOP IN! I'LL RUN YOU TO THE DE-BRIEFING ROOM TO HEAR YOUR TALE!

COULD I JUST NIP OVER TO MY BILLET, SIR? I WON'T BE A MOMENT. I'LL COME STRAIGHT OVER TO DE-BRIEFING!

ALTHOUGH, SURPRISED THE C.O. DID NOT OBJECT TO THE REQUEST, GREGG HURRIED TO SIME'S BILLET. THE LIGHT WAS ON. HE BURST IN!

GREGG, THANK HEAVEN YOU'RE BACK! HOW DID IT GO? DID YOU...

... LOOK, DON'T WASTE TIME! GET INTO THIS FLYING KIT AND DOUBLE OVER TO THE DE-BRIEFING ROOM... I'LL TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED AS YOU CHANGE! HURRY!

SIME WAS SO APPALLED AT GREGG'S TALE THAT HE COULD HARDLY CONCENTRATE ON PUTTING ON HIS FLYING KIT.

BUT THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE! LOOK, I CAN'T GO AND SAY ALL THAT TO THEM! THEY WOULD NEVER BELIEVE ME!

...YOU MUST! OTHERWISE WE'LL BOTH BE IN TROUBLE UP TO OUR NECKS!

ONCE SIME HAD GATHERED HIS WITS, HE HURRIED TO THE DE-BRIEFING ROOM. THIS WAS THE BIGGEST 'LINE' HE HAD EVER 'SHOT'. THE C.O. AND THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER LISTENED SILENTLY...

...AND THAT'S THE LOT, SIR... THE OLD KITE IS BACK SAFE AND SOUND!

SERGEANT SIME! THIS IS REALLY AMAZING! THIS WILL GO DOWN IN THE HISTORY OF THE SQUADRON AS ONE OF THE BRAVEST DEEDS EVER DONE. WE'RE ALL VERY PROUD OF YOU, MY BOY! VERY PROUD INDEED! WAIT TILL COMMAND HEAR OF THIS!



AS THE C.O. SPOKE SIME REALISED THAT HE COULD NEVER GO THROUGH WITH THE LIE. THE CONGRATULATIONS SEARED HIM WITH SHAME...

DIDN'T DO IT? WHAT ON EARTH DO YOU MEAN? OF COURSE YOU DID! YOU JUST TOLD ME...

...I'M SORRY, SIR! BUT I'M AFRAID THAT I DIDN'T DO THIS!

YOU'D BETTER HEAR THE STORY FROM THE BEGINNING!

THE C.O. LISTENED WITH SET FACE. HE WAITED UNTIL SIME'S STORY CAME TO A HALTING END...

... A QUEER BUSINESS INDEED! THIS FELLER GREGG... YOU SAY HE DID THIS FOR YOU TO HAVE A NIGHT OFF!

YESSIR!

WELL I SUPPOSE YOU MUST HAVE NEEDED IT BADLY TO DO SUCH A DARN FOOL THING! THE BEST THING IS TO SAY NO MORE ABOUT IT. HAVE L.A.C. GREGG REPORT TO MY OFFICE AT 9 O'CLOCK!

THE C.O. KNEW THAT A MAN WAS NOT A COWARD BECAUSE HE SUDDENLY FELT HE COULDN'T FLY. HE KNEW THAT SIME NEEDED A REST, AND WOULD DOUBTLESS GO BACK TO THE FIGHT. HE WAS RIGHT, BUT, GREGG... AN L.A.C. ARMOURER GOING ON OPERATIONS ...IT WAS INCREDIBLE.

... NOW THEN, GREGG, I'VE HEARD WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY. YOU'VE DONE VERY WELL! VERY WELL INDEED! I MAY... OR MAY NOT... PUT YOU FORWARD FOR AIRCREW TRAINING! BUT ONE THING I AM GOING TO DO IS TO PUT YOU ON A CHARGE! YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY GOT TO LEARN DISCIPLINE!

AS SIME WAS LEAVING THE CAMP ON LEAVE HE PASSED THE BARRACK SQUARE...

COME ON THERE!
PICK UP YOUR FEET! LEFT
RIGHT! LEFT RIGHT!
COME ON, GREGG,
SWING YOUR
ARMS!

POOR OLD
GREGG!



BUT SOME NEED NOT HAVE FELT SORRY FOR JIMMY GREGG. AS THE L.A.C. MARCHED UP AND DOWN ON HIS PUNISHMENT DRILL, HE WORE THE CALM, CONTENTED EXPRESSION OF A MAN WHO HAD PROVED HIMSELF IN WHAT HE HAD SET OUT TO DO... TO FLY WITH THE R.A.F. BOMBER CREWS. AND HE WAS PRETTY SURE, TOO, THAT IT WASN'T GOING TO BE HIS LAST FLIGHT.



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